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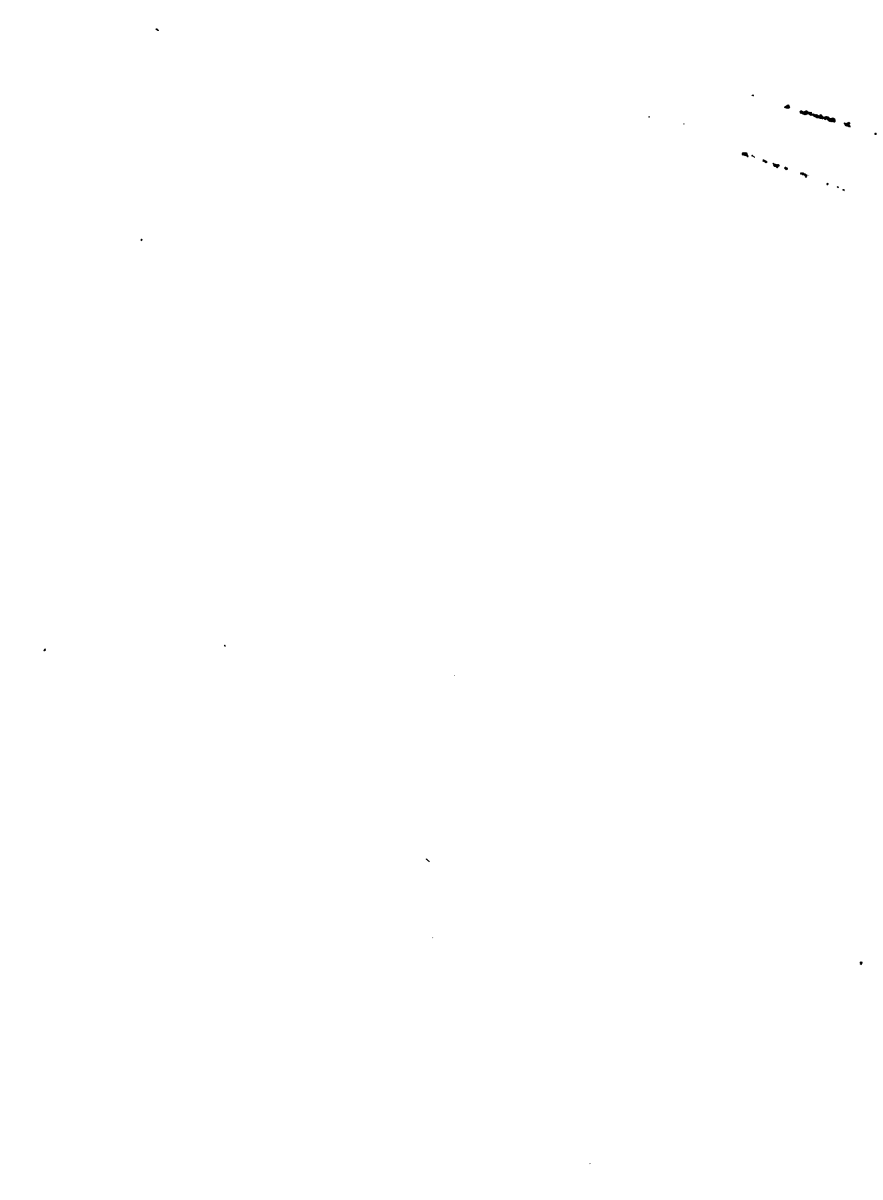
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# The Tragedy of Hogard

Walter Plater



JOHN ELGIN MATHEWS, VICE PRESIDENT, 1911

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THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD



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THE  
RAGEDY OF ASGARD

BY  
VICTOR PLARR

LONDON  
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1905

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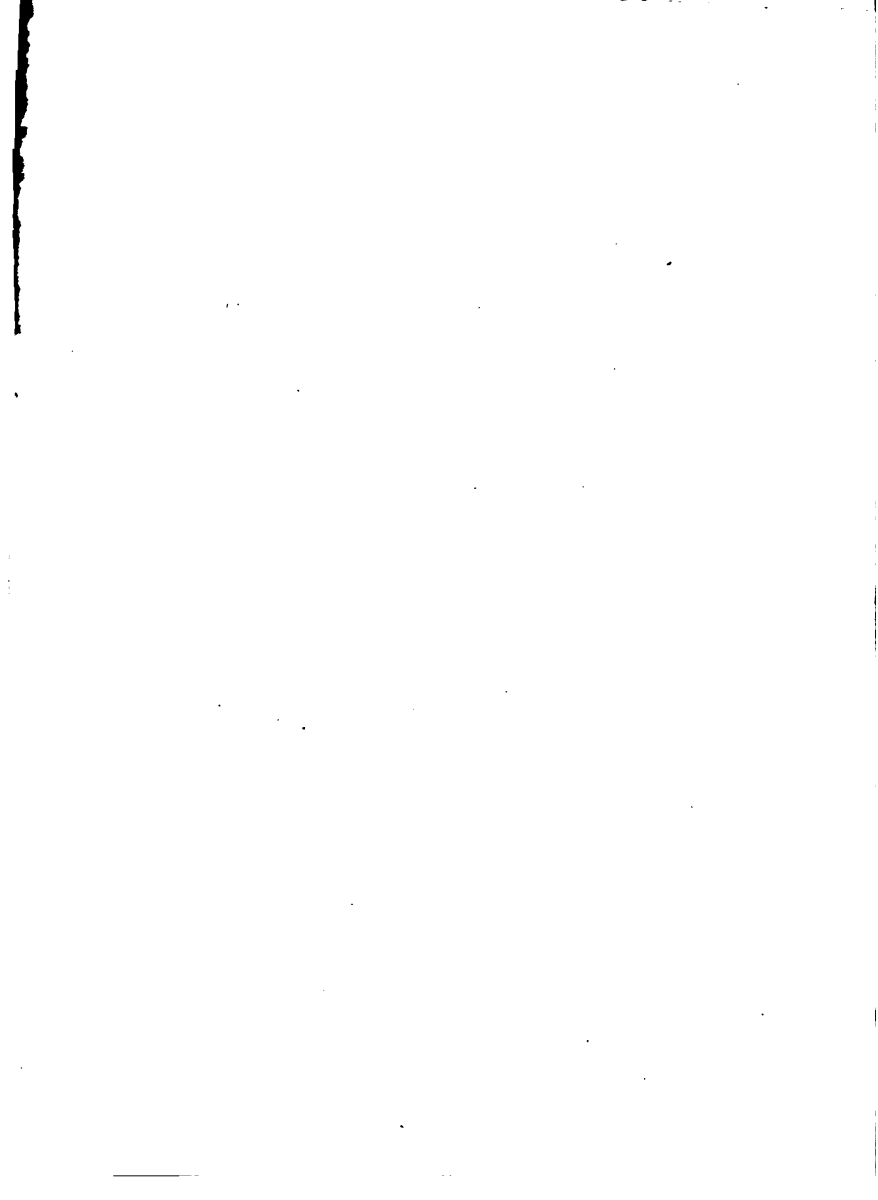
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TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY COUSIN BY MARRIAGE,  
**FRÉDÉRIC GUILLAUME BERGMANN,**  
PROFESSOR OF FOREIGN LITERATURE  
AND DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF LETTERS OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF STRASBOURG;  
CHEVALIER OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR OF  
FRANCE, ETC., ETC.;  
TRANSLATOR OF THE "LESSER EDDA," ETC., ETC.



## Argument

THE gods, still mourning for Balder, meet to forget their sorrow in Oegir's halls below the sea. Loki, the betrayer of Balder, forces his company upon them and insults them ; he prophesies their fall, but escapes their vengeance. The gods seek Loki and are led to find him by Odin. They catch the Betrayer in his own net and bind him. Their return to their city of Asgard, and the beginning of their decline. An address to Bragi on the purpose of the poem. The imperfection of the gods, and the vanishing of truth, faith, and love. The wickedness of the great, the wretchedness of the little, and the Fimbul Winter, lasting three years. The gods seek Wala, the prophetess, who tells them the meaning of these signs in the Volüspa-Saga. The Universal Darkness falls and the Powers of Evil are unloosed. A description of them. Heimdal assembles the gods by a blast on the Horn of Giöll. His powers. Odin rides to visit Mimir's Well, there to take counsel with the Head f

## ARGUMENT

Mimir. The Ash-tree of Yggdrasil and its economy, as also the attributes of the Norns and Regin, are set forth. Odin leaves his eye in pawn with Mimir, and returns blinded to Asgard. The coming of the Fires of Muspel and of the Ship of Dead Men's Nails are described. The building of this ship, its captain and crew. The Ship of the Giants. The landing of the Ships' crews. They cross the ruins of the Trembling Bridge of Bifröst and assemble for the Last Battle on the great Plain of Wigrid. The arming of Odin. He rides forth to war, accompanied by the gods and by his people, whose glories and attributes are set forth. The Last Battle is described as it is fought : the gods and their assailants die by each other's hands. The Fires of Muspel and Surtur's flaming brand destroy the world. After long darkness it is re-formed, and Balder with five others returns to rule it. Their doings, remembrances, and building. Balder prophecies, and Life and Desire of Life awake from magic sleep to be the first parents of the races of the world.

## Loki's Insulting

A BARD in unforgotten verse has told  
How Loki slew by stealth and Balder died,  
And the remorseful Hodur, instrument  
Of Loki's guile, fell on his sword like Saul,  
And perished in his house while slept the gods  
In Asgard near him, so that the new ghost  
Quick followed Balder's to the shores of Hel,  
Thus expiating ill an innocent crime,  
Wrought, when, in blindness, Loki whispering  
him,

He flung the Bough of Mistletoe and slew  
Balder the Bright, esteemed invulnerable,  
Balder the Beautiful, the clement god.  
Arnold, ensuing Balder's virtue, ceased  
Singing his lustrous theme when Hermod stood  
At gaze, while Balder and that dear god's wife,



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Who softly died for love of him in sleep,  
Took each a hand of Hodur's, and all three,—  
The bright forgiving and the blind forgiven,—  
“Departed o'er the cloudy plain, and soon  
Faded from sight in the interior gloom.”  
They had gone down to Death nor might return,  
And Hermod with a sigh rode back to Heaven.

. . . . .  
There came a day when the divinities  
In Oegir's habitation, crystal-wrought,  
Assembled at the bottom of the deep.  
It was the time for harvesting the flax,  
And, grieving still for Balder, they repaired  
To drink their anguish down in golden mead  
And to become forgetful. Far below  
The lapsing of the waves gleam Oegir's halls,  
Lit by the corals and the golden ores  
That burn in the green waters underneath  
The swiftly-cleaving ships of fair-haired men.  
Oegir, the Giant, and his consort Ran,  
Are by the gods beloved and roam the seas  
Restlessly evermore amid their band  
Of water-spirits. Now the mournful gods,

## LOKI'S INSULTING

Assembled in the glimmering sunk house,  
Sate each in state along the board enthroned.  
Thor only was not there, for he was gone  
To help the peasants cut the weavers' flax  
And to slay giants and huge noisome beasts  
Such as lie ambushed for lone harvesters.  
Then slily Loki glided into hall,  
Softly with catlike step, to drink the mead,  
And tilt the long horn to the rafters high,  
And once again mix in divine discourse.  
But Funafeng, who stood as sentinel  
By the great door, delayed his mean advance.  
"There is no seat," he cried, "prepared for thee  
In Oegir's hall. Go, seek thyself a place  
In Angurboda's house who bore thee wolves!"  
Loudly the gods acclaimed bold Funafeng,  
But anger leapt in Loki's tragic heart,  
And lifting up his hand he struck one blow  
And slew the watchman. Thereupon arose  
A clamour of immortal voices joined  
To mourn that outrage. Had not blood been spilt  
In holy places? Swift the gods to arms  
Flew and on Loki rushed, but in the whirl

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Of dispread golden draperies he dodged,  
Slipt in a twinkling from the unguarded door,  
And, turning crab, lurked in a wood hard by  
Made of old sea-wrack and fine-branching tulse.  
Slowly the gods each to his place returned,  
And now the mead flowed free, and every hand  
Held up a horn that of itself refilled.  
Beyggwir and Beyla, the housekeeper, served,  
And tottering brought the Boar Serimner's flesh  
Heaped on great platters. Soon the God of  
Masques,  
The Mumel-King, stood forth. He brought with  
him  
Gleemen with harps and jugglers deft to toss  
The dagger's danger and the whirl of balls  
Swift-circling round their heads. The gods forgot  
Their anger, for no feast could they contrive  
In Heaven's high hall more excellent than this.  
Then Loki in their midst, creeping low-bent  
Among the benches, sudden reappeared.  
He had found Eldir at the gate on guard  
And thus had asked : " Of what do they  
discourse,

## LOKI'S INSULTING

The Gods of Victory ? " Eldir replied :—  
" Of arms and valiant deeds, but not of thee !  
Never a word of Loki now they tell ! "  
And the bad god had thrust him on one side,  
Averring loud : " Then will I join myself  
Unto their company and with their shame  
So cover them and guilt, not one shall dare  
Answer me any word." Among the gods  
Sudden he loomed, and a deep quiet reigned,  
And every burning eye on him was bent  
Who with red death had sullied sanctuary.  
Then boldly Loki asked :—" Will you refuse  
Me your co-equal, me a god like you,  
A bench at table and a cup of mead ? "  
But Bragi, god of poets, answer made,—  
" Never shall we consent to take you back  
Vile Lok, on equal terms ! " Then Loki turned  
To glorious Odin. " Hast thou then forgot  
How in old days," he cried, " we mingled blood,  
Spurting from our right arms, in the same bowl,  
And how we swore fraternity and vowed  
Never to drink unless his fellow drank ? "  
Vainly he did not speak, for Odin now

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Remembered that old customary bond.  
So he bade Widar make a place for Loki  
Beside him on the bench and give him mead,  
Perjured although he was, yea, wholly vile.  
Then Loki at one draught the mead drank down :  
" All hail," he cried, " O holy gods ! All hail,  
Most noble goddesses ! But on this Brag  
Confusion fall, for he denied me drink  
When that I thirsted." Silent Bragi sat,  
Then in a simple passionate phrase averred,  
" I would give sword, and ring, and horse, if now  
I could ensure that Lok no more should harm !"  
But the Blasphemer : " Bragi is not rich  
In treasure of bright rings ; the Prince of Skalds  
Has little use for swords, and only wants  
A horse to flee upon when foes press hard !  
You know a herd of swine will frighten him  
In a farm-garth—this gentle god of songs !"  
Then Bragi challenged him to instant fight,  
But Loki, as insulting guests are wont,  
Heeded him not and quietly poured forth  
Continuous torrents of accusing speech,  
Veiling his insolence in polished phrase

## LOKI'S INSULTING

With smiles to right and left. Unscholared folk  
Had almost deemed him versed in compliment.  
His art—Oh, is it not well practised still  
In large luxurious cities? He o'erwhelmed  
Both goddesses and gods with charges dark,  
Aspersions couched in tropes and gracious words.  
Odin and Freya were tormented so,  
That she cried out: "Were only Balder here,  
My son had silenced thy too slanderous tongue!"  
"Queen of the Goddesses," he mild rejoined,  
Speaking as soft as though he wooed her love,  
"Shall I confess to thee one more misdeed  
Done by thy serf? Shall I avow 'twas I  
Gave the branched Mistletoe to Hodur blind  
That he might send thy darling down to Hell?"  
Loud shrieked the Queen of Goddesses; the gods  
Caught up their weapons, lying piled around,  
But ere each hand was clasped upon the haft,  
A clap of dreadful thunder shook the house,  
And Thor stood in the middle of the hall,  
Wielding his giant club, Miölnir hight.  
Nothing abashed, him Loki now did taunt,  
Turning upon him with a raging sneer,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

"Hast thou done hiding then within the thumb  
Of Skrymir's glove?" Him Thor, the Heat-  
bringer,

Hlorridi called, with hammer threatened fierce,  
But Loki rose and thus did perorate:—

"Lo, I have sung your glory in these halls,  
But see, this glory shall vanish soon  
When once Destruction's burning fires draw near  
Here for the last time they have drunk cool mead,  
For Ragnarök is coming! As for me  
I hide myself from that uplifted club,  
Whereof the wielder fain would strike me down!"  
And ere the mace could fall—yea, ere it fell,  
Innocuous in air, straining Thor's arm,  
And ere the gods could utter any word,  
Sudden, before their dazed immortal eyes  
Loki became a fish and darted far  
Through the wide doorway in the rushing floods.  
Long the gods sought for Loki. They went  
through

Asgard their city, Midgard or man's earth,  
And Jotunheim and the Black Elves' abode;  
Yet found not. Then great Odin did ascend

## LOKI'S INSULTING

To Lidskialf's solitary lodge on high,  
And sate him on his throne, and gravely scanned  
The Nine Wide Worlds, and at the last he saw  
A lonely house on a high mountain side,  
Where the Betrayer lurked. Descending swift,  
The gods he taught where Loki should be found.  
So they marched thither, but the watchful god  
Dived as a salmon in a raving flood.  
His fire was smouldered on his hearth, and there  
Geifion beheld the semblance of a net,  
Woven by Loki in long watchful days.  
It was the first that ever yet was woven,  
And Lok had flung it madly in the flame  
When he beheld the fast approaching gods,  
But the gods drew it forth, and copied it,  
And with the double of his snare entrapped  
Their guileful trapper in a foaming pool.



## The Binding of Loki.

So Loki was brought low, and lay, firm bound  
With what were sinews of his murdered son,  
Upon the destined rocks, whereof the first  
Tortured his shoulders, the next tore his loins,  
And the last cut his knee-strings. Now the gods  
Had brought him his son Wali to behold  
Their judgment, and with Wali Narwi came,  
And their lamenting mother, long-despised,  
Sigyn ; but Wali turned into a wolf  
And rent his brother Narwi limb from limb,  
And straightway bounded to a craggy ledge  
And howled. With sinews of such fratricide  
Loki, the Insulter, was enmeshed and chained,  
For the gods turned the flesh to heavy chains,  
And left him on a solitary cliff,  
Above the torrent, clamouring hoarsely down  
Beside the windy House of Many Doors,

## THE BINDING OF LOKI

Where he had watched their coming, nor availed  
His ultimate flight, albeit suddenly  
He changed into a salmon in the foam.  
Now aspish poison dropped upon his brow  
From time to time, when faithful Sigyn took  
The slopping platter full of venom forth  
To pour away. Then with unshielded brows  
Loki received the slime of that long snake  
That Skadi tied above him. For each taunt  
Erst hurled by him at the high feasting gods,  
The exulting gods together drawn to feast  
In Oegir's crystal hall, a burning gout  
Fell. He cried shrilly, miserably writhed,  
Crisped anguished limbs in unimagined pain,  
And cursed his lords, who the more tortured him,  
Seeing that his jibes had been a part of truth,  
And truth is often satire fit to spoil  
Ev'n the serenity of glorious gods.  
So greatly now he writhed, so madly called,  
Earth with huge throes unto her midriff shook—  
(Men call this earthquake in their ignorance).  
But the great Aesir, the Sustainers, high  
And very holy, had returned to heaven,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

And found its greenness and its splendours gone,  
A twilight fading redly in the streets  
Of Asgard town, as fades in some starved haunt  
Of earthly toil the day, when all the looms  
And every anvil fire has ceased to sing :  
The wheels are silent, the coal-ash turns grey,  
A thousand haggard workmen swarm the roads,  
Too piteous to seek drink, confused, ashamed,  
Walking midway the ruts, for now the wains  
And fetlocked horses no more strain along,  
And to starve fronts them, and their governors,  
Unread in ancient rede, unlettered fools,  
Have damned the runnels of the commonwealth  
With drift of catchwords. Not less miserably,  
Though grandlier far and for a different cause,  
After the punishment condign, returned  
The glorious gods to Asgard's darkening streets,  
Where all the gables nodded, touched with gloom,  
And a dull mildew through the rising wind  
Assailed, as on a battle-field, their sense  
And stirred foreboding terrible and new  
In minds still wrung by vengeance on that power,  
That Loki, that insulter, that vile chief

## THE BINDING OF LOKI

Of spirit gaolers, that strong artizan  
Of traps and walls for prisoners divine,  
Him by whose innocent-seeming wit was slain,  
Balder the Beautiful.

To golden beds  
The gods stole silent, too distraught to feast.

## The Fimbul Winter

THE gods in their remorse and their decline,  
How they were judged and how endured eclipse,  
Sing through me, Bragi, lord of ancient song,  
Iduna's lover! Make me, too, thy skald,  
Who am of thine old race, that in its time  
In Saxony begot our little clan  
With its grammarians, bookmen, chroniclers,  
Mathematicians, and at last one bard.  
Two hundred years we have been wandering west  
Through tortured France to these New Saxon  
shores,  
Where, among many books, a doorkeeper  
In Wisdom's Temple and the least of bards,  
I end our record, our Old Saxon name,  
Having no man-child. Daughter dear, if thou  
E'er read thy father's verse—what fathers wrote  
We seldom con—if from forgotten shelves

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

Thou draw these writings and those other books,  
Conceived and penned by goodlier wits,—Oh,  
then

Remember thy hereditary lore,  
Our type, and how at least we followed rede  
For its own sake, still cherishing the mind !

. . . . .  
Loki such seed had set in the world's heart  
As could not but grow up and soon expand  
In an ill leafage and disastrous fruit.  
And now, his taunts not blotted from their hearts,  
The gods that are the Law, became afraid.  
They knew themselves imperfect, and the bands  
Of governance from nerveless fingers dropt,  
As drops the frozen rein in Muscovy  
From some tired sledger's clasp upon the snow  
When he that huddles by him is but Death !  
Law's wholesome mastery on earth had ceased,  
And universal overthrow drew nigh.  
All unavailingly Iduna passed  
Each morn through Walhall's courts, and to the  
gods  
Gave the bright Apples of Immortal Youth.

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

That fruitage turned to bitterness and dust  
In hands whence Immortality had flown,  
While upon earth truth vanished, as did faith,  
And Love, that exquisite bond with wife, child,  
home,

Friend, brother, mother, father, ancestry,  
Sublimed when lovers meet, or parents young  
Weep o'er the cradle of a small dead babe,  
Love, the fine mason of immortal life,  
Was so forgotten that he starved through want,  
As starves an old hound at some base fool's door.  
No piety remained, and Man declined  
To utter brute. He grew so covetous,  
Ravened so direly and so fought for self,  
That murder and incendiarism went  
Disguised as paltry violence. Each hour  
There rose a sound of someone groaning forth  
His life upon some threshold. Up to heaven  
Mounted a stream of agonising sound—  
Wail of down-trodden wives and bruised babes,  
Of ravished virgins, of eventrate brides  
Who but at dawn had felt the fluttered hope  
In earliest quickening, of bondmen old

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

In faithful ancient service smitten down,  
Of friends in wrangle stabbed at dice or wine,  
Of just men tortured slow, and of old men  
By vile heirs choked and hurled across their  
    hearths,

Their grey locks dabbled in their poor thin  
    blood!

The world into a tavern stocked with thieves  
Was changed amain, and never pipe was shrilled  
Or tabour beaten, or wild dance performed,  
But to the tune of broken locks and noise  
Of the death-rattle in some innocent throat.  
Hast thou beheld a just man breathing out  
The breath of life? In gusts of painful rhythm  
Those airs that kept him living now exhale.  
He is a mill-race whence the water speeds  
Exhausted through the sluices! Yet he lives,  
And still we nurse a hope that, at the last,  
Propt in the kind arms of some loving friend,  
He will return to reason and dear speech.  
So was it with an agonising world.  
Hourly incontinence and rapine swelled,  
And little folk and poor crouched low in death,



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

And babes by smoking cradles crawled and died  
Athwart starved breasts that gave forth blood  
for milk.

Old the recital, for we know it well  
In Macedon to-day, or where they burn  
Negroes to make a squalid demos cheer !  
And evermore the sun went ranging round  
High heaven, pursuing his accustomed course,  
But through dun mist he shone as through a veil,  
And in high summer shed not any warmth.  
Then came untoward winter, horrible,  
A winter full of terrors and despairs,  
The Fimbul Winter by dead skalds proclaimed.  
All heaven was grey with infinite falling snow,  
Flake pressing upon flake, till upturned eyes  
Were darkened suddenly, and all the lakes  
And every winding water froze at once  
Down from the surface to the nether depths,  
Where sleep unharmed the spotted trout to-day.  
The water-fowl were clipt where'er they swam,  
And died, dark forms of grace on leagues of  
white ;  
The vole, forth-peeping from its gallery,

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

With icicles was pierced, the lithest fish  
Enclosed where he was gliding and held fast  
With open eye, till it, too, dimmed in death ;  
The bear within his den froze in his sleep ;  
In far abyssms of wood wild-cat and lynx  
Died, and the urox in the glade grew stark,  
His great horns poised immovable in death.  
The fox was frozen with uplifted paw  
And nostrils spread to scent out hutch or roost.  
Wolves, hunting in gaunt packs, were stricken  
dead

In act to spring upon some fleeing sledge  
Or lofty-antlered deer just brought to bay.  
Sledgers and hunted stag were turned to ice,  
Exchanging death for death. On his bone skates  
A thegn was frozen; speeding to his bride.  
Has he remained in some deep arctic flow,  
Some hoary berg ? Shall we behold him yet,  
As that poor tottering woman at the foot  
Of the Alpine glacier once again beheld  
Her lover, fresh in death, involved in ice,  
Unchanged as when he lived, who slowly down  
From the high mountain had made long descent

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Through three score years, and looked on her  
once more

With open eyes, those eyes she loved in youth?  
The thegn would find no one of his old world,  
And even his golden hair and fierce blue eyes  
Gone from our mixed mirk types. 'Twas then  
maybe

That long-haired elephant was merged in ice,  
Descending on him in a freezing flood,  
That formed immediately a cliff of glass.  
Perfect he froze, upright, upon his march,  
And no man saw him more at any time,  
Till the shy Tungoose, 'neath Napoleon's star,  
Hunting, beheld him first, and stood at gaze,  
Marvelling to see that miracle in ice!  
Half the thatched homesteads and cross-timbered  
thorps

Scattered abroad in spaces of the woods,  
Were buried deep and they that in them dwelt  
Died, as a mouse dies in a huswife's trap.  
Three years that winter without break endured,  
Three livelong years by summer never touched,  
Summer, or sweet breath of the dawn of spring.

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

The interminable firwoods died of frost :  
The verdure of the world that frost defies  
In common winters, was charred black by it  
And rotted : not a tree and not a bush,  
Thick evergreen and stalk, but perished frozen  
And blighted to the core. Alone the rich,  
Alone the sleek and strong, the sharp-faced men  
And smooth plump women in that Fimbultide  
Escaped by right of cunning. They escaped—  
They wrapped their thick furs round them—they  
went mad !

Upon red lips, still dewed with redder wine,  
The lie ceased not, and great adulteries,  
And greater murders and enormous deeds  
Of fierce oppression and incestuous guile,  
Made of the living few a maniac rout.  
But all the gods had veiled their eyes and sat  
Palsied on golden thrones, and every hour  
There reached them sounds of someone groaning  
forth

His life upon some threshold. Up to heaven  
Mounted a stream of agonising sound—  
Cries of down-trodden wives and bruised babes,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Of ravished virgins, of eventrate brides,  
Who but at dawn had felt the fluttered hope  
In earliest quickening, of bondmen old  
In faithful ancient service smitten down,  
Of friends in wrangle stabbed at dice or wine,  
Of just men tortured slow, and of old men  
By vile heirs choked and hurled across their  
    hearths,

Their grey locks dabbled in their poor thin blood!  
Meanwhile the sons of Fenris, that were wolves  
Even as their sire, grew into dreadful shapes,  
Horrible monsters, whom the Giantess,  
Ancient of Forests, fed with marrow drawn  
From murdered perjurers' and adulterers' bones,  
Giving them drink of perished poisoners' blood,  
And of dead wastrels' who their sires had slain  
Or brethren. So, in some degenerate age,  
But differently and without excuse,  
Mammon feeds full her fat liberticides  
With marrow of republics, liberties old  
Nothing can re-create, but for which died  
The struggling, ragged herdsmen. There lacked  
    not

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

Abundance of the marrow of old sins!  
Then the shamed gods bethought them of one  
    dead,  
Whose dim tomb lies close to the gate of Hel,  
And, through their magic arts not quite forgot,  
They conjured her within it from deep rest.  
So they asked Wala, the strange prophethess,  
“What mean these signs?” And she, sitting  
    high-propped  
Upon her tripod, spoke to Odin’s face.  
Mystic and grandiose the rune she said,  
That old Volüspa-Saga hard to spell,  
While round her the grouped gods sate, chin on  
    hand,  
Shadowy, sorrowful, their harps and arms  
Heaped huge around them. A long while she  
    sang  
Of that which she had seen and they should see,  
Of the Creation and the Fire to come.  
And having ended, she re-veiled her head  
And was conducted to her tomb by gods.  
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.  
Distraught to golden beds the Powers repaired.

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Scarce one knew sleep when, at the dawn, came  
dark.

The glory of the sun was blotted out,  
And over heaven flew evil Women Wise  
(Witches our boors still call them). Fjalar  
crowed—

That vermeil cock of Asgard. Loud he crowed,  
Loudly his wings he flapped, as now, at noon,  
The strange mechanic bird of Strasburg flaps  
His wings when Peter shall deny his God.  
And answering him, the Fowl of Helheim sang ;  
His feathers burning redly like a coal,  
And all in waking earth that descant heard.  
Then instantly the general terror came.  
Skiöll and Hati, those enormous wolves,  
Who chased the chariots of the Light for aye,  
Bounded at last to grapple with Sun and Moon,  
And ate them with foamed jaws and slaving  
tongues.

Then fell thick night. Inspissate darkness  
reigned

In heaven and earth, and earth shook through  
and through,

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

Even as the slumbrous silence when a hound,  
Darkling beside his master's couch at night,  
Shakes his rough hide like some dull cracking  
thong,

Then settles suddenly in utter sleep.

But sleep forsook that world: rent were all  
bonds,

Broken the links that prisoned rebellious limbs.  
High-poised in anguish on the three sharp rocks,  
Upon the steep and solitary ledge,  
Above the torrent clamouring hoarsely down,  
Beside the windy Lodge of Many Doors,  
Loki awoke and cast abroad his chains.

This evil godhead in forgotten years  
Had ta'en to paramour the giantess  
Signal of Anguish, Angurboda. She  
A monstrous progeny had brought him forth,  
The Fenrir Wolf, the Midgard Snake, and Hel,  
As in just wedlock Sigyn bore him, too,  
Narwi and Wali—Sigyn faithful still  
In vigils at the tortured Loki's head,  
Which she protected from the aspergent snake  
By Skadi tied above him. Fenris now



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Rose from his place where Asgard's hills slope  
down

To Midgard or Man's habitable world.

Upon that frontier he had stayed since first

Tyr led him greatly howling out of heaven,

When Odin, mightiest of gods, had hurled

The Snake and Hel into blank outer space.

Tyr long had fed him : now he slipt his noose,

Made by dark elves of six strange mysteries—

The echo of the footfalls of a cat,

A fishes' breath, the spittle of a bird,

A mountain's roots, the talons of a bear,

A woman's beard miraculously grown.

Gleipnir its name, and after trials three

The gods had bound it on him. Now it fell,

And with it, too, the sword that held apart

His slaving jaws, whence flowed the River

Wan,

Flood of Regret. He overturned the rock

Giöll, the Sounding, and the mighty stone,

That held his knotted tether. He was free,

For Law relaxed unloosens every bond.

He shook himself, this destined Scourge of God,

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

Stretched, and with gambolling white-fanged  
progeny

Cantered to Loki, scenting a great strife.

So, upon Exmoor, canter the tall hounds

To where the huntsmen meet to chase the stag,

Last of primeval sports. But Fenris soon

Opened his jaws, whereof his upper one

Butted high heaven amain, the nether earth.

Wider he would have yawned that dreadful mouth

Had space been granted him. Four burning  
streams

Burst from his eyes and nostrils. With him ran

Garm, the huge hound that guards the Gnyppa

Cave

In Hel's domain, with jaws distilling blood,

The while he gnashes them and snarls at sight

Of all the pale and vanishing hosts that come

Pilgrims from Midgard's happier table-land,

Pilgrims with nothing in their clasp save dust,

And, except mould, nothing in mouth and eye!

Hel's house-dog he—Hel, that had sunk nine days

Past the morasses of the Place of Mists,

Hight Nifelheim, to her allotted realm,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

What time All-Father hurled her into space  
With the great Serpent. Half her countenance  
Was white as is a corpse, and the other mirk  
As is the sepulchre. No living eye  
Beholds her but at once 'tis glazed in death.  
Innumerable songs a skald might word  
Of her huge realm, the Strand of Corpses called,  
And its terrific gates and all within,—  
Her Hall hight Space of Tempests, and her Dish  
Hunger, and Sultr her sharp Knife of Death ;  
Her Butler Slow-foot and her Damsel Sloth ;  
Her Gateway Falling Fate,\* her Threshold steep  
' That which fatigues through suffering,' her Bed  
Sickness, her Curtain ' Bale that peepeth  
through.'†

Of how she, rarely, blossoms in her dark,  
And opens happy halls to the innocent dead,  
Who died of age and sickness or mischance,  
Not in the terror of the throes of war,  
And how, when Balder came with Nanna fair,  
He dead in harmlessness, she dead for love,

\* Fallanda-forat.

† Blikiandaböl.

## THE FIMBUL WINTER

To bide with Hel, she feasted them and blazed  
Amid her followers on thrones of gold,—  
Of this some puling modern bard might sing,  
Intent on good in necessary woe,  
And eager to spell softness from the flint.  
But now her followers were for no feast  
Or blaze of gold, but with her Hound went up  
To Fenris' side, with him to rend the world  
And slay the gods themselves. Just then the sea  
Moved horribly and, in a mighty wall,  
Quite overflowed the land. It was the Worm  
Stirring in the deep ocean at the base  
Of Midgard's rocky zone, where she had lain,  
Writhed into endless knots and lastly curled  
With tail in mouth, since Odin cast her down  
With Hel, her sister, into outer space.  
And now she rose and reared her frightful head,  
And lashed impatiently in giant wrath,  
Longing for that encounter, as a snake,  
Imprisoned behind glass, at midnight writhes  
And lashes to and fro incessantly,  
Awaiting the live things that are his meal!

## Mimir's Well

**THEN** Heimdal, the white god, in darkness rose,  
And left his cup of hydromel, and blew  
The Horn of Giöll. Virgins nine him bore:  
To be the janitor of Heaven and guard  
The Bridge of Bifröst from the giant men  
Within the mountains and those vast retreats,  
The Realm of Frost contains, who, but for him,  
Incessantly to Asgard would ascend  
Across that trembling passage. So sublime  
His sense, so pure, he hears the wool-fell grow  
On the sheep's back : his ears record the sound  
Of the grass budding, and his eyes, not dark,  
Though the two Wolves had eaten Sun and Moon,  
Can see a hundred miles, and now behold  
In the far mirk of night untoward things.  
Less sleep has he than even a timorous bird,  
That trembles on its bough and all night long

## MIMIR'S WELL

Fears the snake's visit. Exquisitely clear  
Rang the Giallahorn, that mystic trumpet!  
Through all the homes of Heaven it rang and  
    woke

Aesir and heroes, warning them to arm  
For the Last Battle. Then tall Odin set  
His hat upon his head, whereof the brim  
Is made of clouds, athwart his shoulders drew  
The mantle of the stars, and in his stall  
Sought the horse Sleipnir. Gloriously the barb  
Neighed to behold his master, pricked his ears  
And turned his gaze, tenderly yet with pride,  
To Odin's hand. Him mounting, Odin rode,  
Easily pacing with untightened rein,  
To Mimir's Well, which lies below that Tree  
Hight the Ash of Yggdrasil. Around the world  
It grows, for Asgard and the Realms are held  
Within its branches wide, and even the sea  
That girdles Midgard is involved in them,  
And Jormundgandir, the long Midgard snake  
Is but enclasped within that tree's wide arms  
Though she herself writhes round the base of  
    earth.

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Now, in an ancient Edda, it is taught  
That the Ash of Yggdrasil is holiest  
Of all the meeting-places of the gods.  
Thither each day along the Trembling Bridge  
Of Bifröst they rode out, in the elder time,  
To sit in judgment. Ah, that Yggdrasil  
Is necessarily the first of trees  
And greatest, for its boughs their umbrage fling  
Over the dwellings of the world and soar  
Above high heaven itself. Upon three roots  
It stands upheld, that reach to utter space.  
One lies beneath the streets of Asgard old,  
Of Heaven itself, and there is Urdur's Fount,  
Where the Divinities in judgment sit.  
And one below the Giants of the Frost,  
Rimethurses called or Jotuns, Utgard's race,  
Obscurely writhes where spreads that solitude,  
Which once was called "The Gaping of the  
Jaws"—  
Ginnunga-Gap,—that void whence came the  
world.  
Between the North and Muspel's breath of flame,  
Muspel the fiery furnace of the South,

## MIMIR'S WELL

Yawns the dim gulf, the void. 'Twas there long  
since

That Imir, earliest semblance of a man,  
Father of all the crooked little dwarfs  
Whose far-struck hammers on the miner's ear  
Clang weird and tuneful in deep galleries,  
Was formed from drops of ice, and brought to  
view,

And nourished by the Cow, Aud-humla called,  
Which like the Snake from Aryan India comes,  
Coeval with all life. And the third root  
Is under Nifelheim, the Place of Mists,  
Ay, under Hel, that deeper dark resort,  
And underneath this root Hver-Gelmir roars,  
The Fount of Clamour, and 'tis gnawed for aye  
By Nid-högg, the fierce dragon of the pit,  
Companioned by innumerable worms.  
But underneath the root that twines immense  
Below the Giants, the Rimethurses named,  
Forevermore comes bubbling purely forth  
The clear delightful wave of Mimir's Well,  
Wherein is all the Wisdom of the World.  
This Ash of Yggdrasil has many boughs,



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Inhabited by four mysterious stags,  
That feed on them, and errant to and fro  
Find secure passage, and upon its top,  
Perched solitary on its loftiest bough,  
Lārad, which overshadows the proud home  
Of heroes, called Valhalla, where they feast,  
An eagle fierce of aspect sits sublime,  
Of infinite lore possessed. "Nay, know you it?  
But what?" as, in the Song of Wala, speaks  
The Prophetess in darkling, questioning rune,  
Now being to be fulfilled. Between his eyes  
A goshawk hangs, Terror of Tempests called.  
And up and down the whole height of the Tree,  
Chattering incessantly, the Rat's Compeer,  
The Squirrel Rataköstr, without cease,  
Skips, bearing to and fro the words of hate,  
As any little village-gossip would,  
Exchanged between the Dragon far beneath  
And the Eagle in the clouds. But the Rat's  
Mate  
Changes no phrase in any embassy,  
And so nips deeper with well-told truth,  
For truth is often satire that can spoil

## MIMIR'S WELL

Ev'n the serenity of glorious gods.  
O Verity two-edged ! Incessantly  
The Stag Eikthyrnir and old Nid-högg fret  
Leaf-bud and bark of Time's immortal Tree.  
Long since it would have withered but for drops  
Poured on it daily from the Living Flood  
In Urdur's sacred fountain, that turns white,  
Ev'n as is the inner coating of an egg,  
All things that bathe therein. Long, long ago,  
Enveloped in thick dark as with a veil,  
Out of the far-away unknown arrived,  
With aspect as of goddesses, three Shapes  
To water that vast Ash of Yggdrasil,  
And keep it full of freshness and bright leaves.  
The Norns men call them, and mayhap they are  
Destiny visible, for Absolute Fate  
Although he rule inevitably o'er  
Both gods and men, sometimes his power  
restrains  
And looms as Regin—Law, not Orlog—Chance,  
And Regin may be bodied by the Norns.  
Sisters are they. Men surname the eldest Urd,  
Who sits with eyes that brood perpetually

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Upon the Past : Verdandi is the next,  
Who muses on the Present, that poor span  
Ageing within the twinkle of an eye  
Despite men's foolish worship ; and the last  
Glooms ever into far Futurity :  
Skalda her name. Regin's decrees eterne  
They promulgate, dispensing hope or tears,  
Dark tears that blind the windows of the soul ;  
Bright'ning the poor man's brow or making dim  
Houses of kings ; here snipping some life's  
thread

And deathward sending some old honest man,  
There weaving a new skein and setting forth  
A naked soul upon the shore of life,  
For good or ill.

And now that Odin rode,  
Easily pacing with untightened rein,  
To Mimir's Well, they sat beside its flow,  
Silent, their heads close-covered by their veils.  
So shall you see old mountain widows sit,  
Among the dark-haired Celts, by ruined byres  
And low-browed doors, whence goodman or sole  
son

## MIMIR'S WELL

Was carried coffined forth a se'nnight since.  
Unspeakable grey thoughts in caverned eyes  
By tattered tartan veiled ! Oh, who shall guess,  
Render articulate, set down in writ  
Old meditations sombrely withdrawn  
Among throng'd instincts in a mind unplumbed—  
A peasant's, or a yogi's, or a god's ?  
And now, through rising storm as Odin rode,  
A mighty rustling noise assailed his ears,  
A trembling of unnumbered swaying boughs ;  
And in the wind the leaves of Yggdrasil  
Swirled dropping round his head. The World-

Ash rocked

And tugged against its roots, by dragons frayed,  
As a ship tugs its ropes in a great storm  
And hurls its high poop to the hidden stars.  
It seemed the tortured roots would snap or tear,  
And all be chaos o'er All-Father's head.  
But softly Odin leapt from Sleipnir's back,  
And past the moveless, voiceless sisters came  
To Mimir's Well, where whispering he addressed  
Great Mimir's Head, that like the Teraphim  
Shone over the mid-fountain's darkest calm,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Wherein is all the Wisdom of the World.  
Daily the wise man Mimir drank the wave,  
And Odin's self was not too high to ask  
His counsel, for he knew him very wise.  
But Mimir said: "Nothing can I unfold,  
O King of Gods, except thou leave thine eye  
In pawn with me." Now Odin long had lost  
His other in some mystic contest dark,  
In Sagas sung. Yet plucked he his eye forth  
Incontinently with a desperate gest,  
And gave it to the Head. What cryptic words  
Proud Odin spake or what were told in turn  
No ear hath heard, nor any skald essayed  
Since to divine; but, after counsel ta'en,  
Slowly the god arose, paced slowly back,  
And slowly laid a desultory hand  
On Sleipnir's shoulder, and as one in dream,  
Vexed inwardly by some abasing doubt,  
Vaulted into his seat, and with bowed head  
Darkling rode back to his benighted heaven.

## Nagelfari

BLINDED he sped, the stars around him thrown  
Now useless in his cloudy mantle's fold,  
As glow-worms in the meshes of a scarf  
Dropt by a damsel on a bank of moss;  
And as he rode, against his sightless front,  
Racked by such thoughts, sudden there smote a  
breath

Of far-advancing flame. So in the night  
Beyond the Atlantic, on the prairies huge,  
A quick untoward savour of much smoke,  
And on the horizon's verge a battling throb  
Of rushing fire appal the rider lone.  
Swiftly he shakes his rein: his horse in fear  
Tosses its head and spreads strained nostrils  
wide,

Then gallops madly to the desert farm  
To save his master's folk—the shrilling babes,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

The goodwife quickly gathering her goods,  
The children's dress, and water hard to find,  
And papers in their box, and pans, and bread.  
So now tall Odin shook out Sleipnir's rein  
And spurred to Asgard, and the glorious barb,  
Eight-legged, of seed divine, bent nose to earth  
And rushed to Odin's city, scenting ill  
In that advancing flame. Southward it burned  
In Muspel and from Muspel travelled up,  
And its fierce redness covered all the dark,  
And all the waves of seas, transfused to fire,  
Glowed as red coal, and all the skies grew red,  
Vomiting forth great sparks and tongues of heat,  
And through that fury came a gaunt white  
ship.

The building of that vessel was untoward.  
Never should gods have built her ! She is called  
The Ship of Dead Men's Nails, ev'n Nagelfar.  
And Loki was her steersman. At her helm  
He loomed, an awful anger in his eyes.  
What of her building ? Now, alas, although  
Good men had lived and wrought unnumbered  
years,

## NAGELFARI

Impiety was builder of that ship,  
For she was welded from top-mast to keel  
With nails untrimmed, wrenched from th' untended hands  
Of the stark dead, who lay about the fields  
In Midgard, in the Fimbul Winter drear  
When brother warred with brother, son with  
sire,  
And left the corpses with long beards unshorn  
And nails untrimmed, carrion for wolf and crow.  
When that thou trimm'st thy nails, O son of  
man,  
—So might an old, wise skald have counsel  
given—  
Burn what thou parest, for the powers of ill  
Catch ever at these fragments of thyself  
And hold them hostages against thy soul.  
They for long years with such dead spoils contrived  
To fashion Nagelfari, which of late  
Had found in fratricide both ribs and deck,  
Bulwarks and half her hull. And now she  
sailed,



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Wan on the waves, that reddened league on  
league,—

Sailed forward-blown by tempests from the  
south,

With Loki for her steersman, in his eyes  
An awful anger, and beside him set  
Surtur with fiery sword, that waved itself  
Above his head far brightlier than day,  
And all the Sons of Muspel clustered round,  
On thwart and hatchway, hosts of steel-capped  
heads,

Terribly lucent, and strong shoulders dight  
With burning harness, blinding to man's gaze.  
And round the bulwarks of the gaunt white  
ship

The Sons of Muspel had hung out their shields,  
With dragons and old symbols of the pit  
Flamingly traceried. And now behold  
Another craft from eastward cleaving swift  
Through the everlasting sea, a barque of night,  
Thronged with the Giants of the Outer Garth,  
Rimethurses called or Jotuns, who by Thrym  
Their king were steered unto their destiny.

## NAGELFARI

Eye could scarce note the mast of that tall ship,  
So thickly was she thronged from stem to stern  
With clubs and javelins, clasped in monster  
hands,

Nor might ear well endure her swift advance  
So loudly roared the Jotuns in their wrath  
Against their hated lords, pillars of Heaven!  
And now both ships attained the strand desired,  
Where Bifröst's Rainbow-Bridge shone trem-  
bling still.

Disdaining to cast anchor, to the shore  
Rushed in a wading multitude the hosts  
Of Muspel and of Utgard. With them came  
Their horses, lean and terrible of eye,  
Which mounting, they with clatter of great  
hooves

Thundered across the bridge. A flame of fire  
In front of him and walls of flame behind,  
Surtur with brandished sword rode in the van,  
Leading the hosts of Darkness and of Death,  
And as he leapt upon the Bridge, it brake  
Beneath his onset; but the giants strode  
Across the ruined arches, and helped o'er

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

His people to the place for which they sought.  
There is a plain that "trembles at the fight."  
Wigrid 'tis called, and thither Loki led  
His multitudes. So vast is that expanse,  
A man might journey for a hundred days  
Ere he should cross it !

Now its further side  
The embattled Host of Heaven expectant held.

## The Riding of the Gods

GLADLY would I my pen at once concede  
To Snorri, son of Sturla, the famed skald  
Of Iceland, for he wrote, upon a time,  
Of these immortals and their glorious feuds,  
Setting their history behind a veil  
Within a mystic palace, at whose gate  
There stood a jongleur tossing knives in air.  
Seven knives he whirled and did enchant the  
king,

That Saga's hero, seeking ancient lore.  
But Snorri Sturlesson low buried sleeps  
Under some lichen'd wind-affronting cairn  
Far northward, quite forgotten, and to-day,  
Stuffed in this Saxon hamlet overgrown,  
Which is the hugest of all cities built  
By mortal men in any age or land,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

This London, hooded by its cap of clouds  
More terrible than Odin's, we must grope  
Piously dubious for shadowy myths,  
Which once were lifeblood of the heart and  
brain—

The creed of our forefathers at the first  
Ere Hengst and Horse had sailed unto our West.

When over Bifröst unto Asgard's gates  
Odin had rode, blinded, but surely borne  
By Sleipnir scenting ill, the gods who thronged  
About him as he halted in their midst,  
Had armed themselves already, and now shone  
Effulgent and perchance invincible  
In harness fashioned by no mortal hands.  
At once they brought their eyeless god his helm,  
Forged of fine gold, and standing on tiptoe,  
Set it upon his towering head, and slipped  
Along his mighty arm the golden ring  
Draupnir, which but of late from Hel's abode  
Balder, the Beautiful, had sent him back  
By Hermod's hand, and down his shoulders drew  
The glimmering hauberk, link on link, and set  
In his right hand Gungnir the Invincible,

## THE RIDING OF THE GODS

The lance that should not now avail again.  
Then with the clangour of immortal arms  
The glorious Aesir drew unto their fate.  
And first among them towered All-Father blind,  
Directed by his people as was he,  
The old king, who eyeless on his war-horse sate,  
And to a later battle was led forth  
By clustered knights to meet no doubtful doom.  
How splendid in affliction Odin towered,  
Odin of many epithets supreme,—  
The Terrible, the Wanderer, the Calm,  
The Hero, the Helm-Wearer, the Sublime,  
The Shadow as of Hel, the Warrior's God,  
The Joyous of the Hosts, and he that neighs  
In the fight's forefront and that cries Ha, Ha!  
At scent of battle—more than two-score names,  
Each lofty in its kind! And next him rolled  
Thor of the Chariot, Thor of the Aesir, high  
Within his car swift-drawn by the two goats,  
Crack-tooth and Grind-tooth, clenching in his  
hand  
The club Miölnir (that unconquered mace,  
Which oftentimes had hammered Jotun skulls,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

So that in Jotun-land 'tis not forgot,) And girded with the subtle Belt of Strength, Called Megingiardar, which when tightlier drawn Round the god's waist redoubles godlike power, And mittened with those Iron Gloves renowned Wherewith alone the Hammer's shaft he holds. And after Thor Niördur came, the lord Of Skadi. Master he of waves and fire, Controller of the goings of the wind, To whom both fishermen and mariners Should offer prayers as patron. Wealthy he, Giver of wealth, and lover of those shores Made noisy with the busy sea-mews' call, Which Skadi hated ; but of this not now. Upon a splendid horse, Gyllir or Gladr, Gler, Skeid-brimir or Silfrin-toppr yclept— For the Aesir have twelve steeds of race divine— Niördur rode, and with him Freya moved And Frey, his children, beautiful of face With gold ambrosial curls of antique song ! Freya the Huntress, Mother of the Gods, Flashes her blue eyes and lets float her locks

## THE RIDING OF THE GODS

From a low chariot drawn by wild cats twain,  
Soft-footed emblems of prolific life.  
Protectress she of increase, growth, and bloom,  
Who from her lovely gardens underneath  
Clear lakes and running waters of the world  
Brings little babes to birth or back receives  
Their innocent frail bodies crushed by life  
In barbarous lands, and nurses them for aye  
On her white bosom in Fensaler's halls  
Beside the sand-dunes and the shore. 'Tis she  
Who is accounted president of Law,  
And the remembered wisdom of old time  
That sits on greybeards' lips unto this day,  
Custom, far mightier than written codes.  
'Tis she apportioned fields, and sacred kept  
Landmarks, and oft on man's meek happiness  
With Odin counsel took or sat like him  
In Lidskialf's solitary lodge on high  
To overlook the doings of the world.  
About her thronged her maidens, who preside  
O'er love and lover—Fulla, golden-haired,  
Her tiring-maid who holds her jewel-case;  
And Gna, the fearless Amazon; and Hlyn



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Who guards her votaries. But now her face  
Was fierce for battle. After her there rode  
A glorious galaxy of blameless gods,  
Hungry for combat, wonderful in strength.  
Valiant and sage rode Tyr, and Bragi, lord  
Of skalds, and singing, and such eloquence  
As severs men sharply from the mere brutes;  
Then Heimdal, the pure god who blows the Horn;  
Vidar the Silent, with the Shoe of Might;  
Vali the Terrible Bowman; Bowman Ullr;  
And Forset, son of Balder, judge divine,  
Who in the glinting House of Glitnir deals  
Justly with mortal causes; but, alas!  
Balder in that high company was not,  
Nor Hodur, the blind god, whom the Aesir now  
Liked not to name because he threw that leaf  
Which brought dear Balder down to a dark  
death.

Nor was the grim Betrayer Loki there.  
And with the thirteen godheads, now but ten,  
Went they who are accounted the gods' friends.  
Three have I named, Fulla, and Gna, and Hlyn—  
The rest are they not writ in Snorri's book?

## THE RIDING OF THE GODS

All are inspirers of the world of men,—  
Rain, and Tradition, and the Healer's Art,  
Virginity, Affection, Love, Denial,  
Assurance, and young Snodra, president  
Of social grace—all rich in attributes,  
And greatly to be sought in pious prayers ;  
And round them surged innumerable hosts  
Of heroes dead in battle, such as marched  
Each morn in companies from Walhall's doors  
To joust in the wide court, and after rain  
Of visionary bloodshed and thick blows  
Innocuous in Asgard, back returned  
To feast at table with the immortal gods  
Through all the sounding night, till each  
dropped down  
Even where he sat, by mead divine o'erborne.  
After the fever and the wounds on earth  
Should these have drunk but water ? Odin's self  
Lived upon wine and gave his meats at meals  
To his familiar wolves and to his crows.  
Glutton and Shameless, Thoughtful and Desire—  
These be the names of them, and by his throne,  
Amid the harp-string music and the mead,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

They stretched towards his hand and watched  
his knife

With an old animal patience, weird to view.  
For the last time Walhalla had unbarred  
Full half a thousand gates ; for the last time  
Eight hundred thegns from each of them had  
poured,

Who now advanced, a host no man might count,  
To the huge Plain of Wigrid. To and fro,  
Beside and in among them, with red spur  
Rode their bright adjutants, Valkyries named.  
But now, among these heroes in the hall  
Blithely they'd served, kneeling had crowned  
their cups

With strong immortal mead and still had kept  
The knives and platters burnished for the feast,  
Still tended each broad dish. Thirteen are they,  
With names of war and fear, as Grímnir tells;  
And other twain on white cloud-horses ride  
At Odin's bidding to all foughten fields,  
And there they sedulously choose the dead  
Who shall return to feast in Odin's halls.  
Alarm and War their names, and with them rides

## THE RIDING OF THE GODS

Skalda, the youngest of the sister Norns,  
Wild arbitress of dim Futurity.  
Upon one knee they kneel in midmost fight,  
Where the shafts hurtle thick, the bucklers clang,  
The harness with tremendous cuts is cloven,  
Upon their other take the languished head,  
And catch the hero's dying breath, and shut  
The fevered eyelids, and straightway arise  
And bear their noble burden to their lord,  
Who deals them half the dead, and keeps one  
half.

Intent upon such spoil, how grandly now  
Along the innumerable armies' moving flanks  
Spurred those bright adjutants, Valkyries called,  
While that the Immortals drew unto their doom!

## The Last Battle.

LOUD with a terrible clamour once again  
Rang the Giallahorn, and now began  
The Last of Battles. Mazy overflows  
Such as upon smooth sands the billow spills,  
Advancing and retreating, surged the hosts  
Ere yet they grappled fiercely hand to hand,  
And from the dark Betrayers' companies  
Fenris set up a long and awful howl,  
While to high heaven the Jormundgandir Worm  
Reared her vile head, and lashing monstrously  
This way and that, envenomed all the skies  
With spurts of poison from her nostrils blown.  
There was no need that day of sun and moon,  
The many fallen stars, or Odin's cloak  
Spangled with astral fireflies, for the flame  
Of Muspel's direful host illumed that war

## THE LAST BATTLE

Brightlier than noon. So, on some Cymric stream,  
The dancing midnight torches sudden glare  
Athwart great spitted salmon tossed to die  
On shingly banks, and on the hurrying forms  
Of the swart poachers with blood-dripping spears.  
And now, a beetling, throbbing wall of fire,  
With crenelations of up-leaping flame,  
The Sons of Muspel roared in swift advance  
Upon the heroes, on the troops of Frey.  
Midmost within that wall of burning heat,  
Surtur, the blackened, loomed with brandished  
sword,

An old ineffable hatred in his eyes.  
Firm stood the innumerable hosts of heaven ;  
And, now with sounding impact shaking earth,  
Those armies rushed together, and awhile,  
Obscurely in close swaddling-bands of flame  
Struggled ; but soon the Sons of Muspel fell  
Backward, discomfited, and the first bout  
Of that titanic war was won by Heaven.  
Yet nought dismayed, Muspel's red hosts returned,  
Dazzling and swift, with Surtur's sword in front,  
And charged again and yet again, as charged

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

At Waterloo an Emperor's chivalry  
Full thirteen times on England's iron squares.  
And now in hundred separate agonies  
Engaged a host of heroes. Thor leapt down  
From his high car and, wielding his great club,  
Slew huge Rimethurses, dragons, beasts of shape  
That man may not imagine, births obscene  
Sprung from the wombs of giantesses old,  
And fierce rebelling gods who travelling far  
In ages long forgot had sowed a seed  
Of vengeful bastardy against high Heaven.  
How gloriously strong Thor of th' Aesir strove,  
How blithely plied Miölnir here and there,  
Crushing the giant skulls and beating down  
Envenomed gaping jaws and fiery crests.  
Oh, he excelled in that last war the toils  
Performed in Utgard when he drained the sea,  
Drinking the Giant's horn, and lifting up  
The Cat that was the-metamorphosed Worm.  
And now the Battle's midmost scene approached.  
Doubtful, with hesitating hands, they led  
Odin into the melée. "Bring me where  
Fenris lies couched to spring!" he cried aloud.

## THE LAST BATTLE

"Alas, I should have cast him into Hel!  
Alas, you tied him insecurely, gods!  
He rages on me! He shall die!" At once  
He plunged with Gungnir his unvanquished  
lance

At what he deemed his huge and shaggy foe.  
He that fights wolves that leap up from the  
ground

Should have a hundred eyes and deftly smite  
The dodging muzzle and side-snapping jaws.  
But Odin saw not now, his eye in pawn  
With Mimir in the Well. In vain he fought.  
How many moments of insensate lunge  
And hopeless parry then ensued none dared  
Recount at any time; for skalds and seers  
Love not to sing death-agonies of gods,  
And Wala's self, who sleeps entombed beside  
Hel's eastward gate, said only, when she spake  
Her mystic prophecy to clustered gods,—  
"Freya's dear hero very soon shall fall!"  
Nought else she told, accounting silence best.  
Had she foreknowledge of that strife untoward?  
Did her eyes pierce the cloud? Beheld she clear



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

The Wolf's devouring fangs and gulping throat,  
And Odin rent in pieces, and——? But no,  
There are some sorrows and deep noble shames  
That blind through sheer dismay and are not  
seen !

So Odin fell, immeasurable loss,  
And now his fate obscure enraged the gods  
And unto desperate forlorn attempts  
One after the other urged them. First, bright  
Freyer,

Niördur's son and Freya's brother, rushed  
To avenge his kinsman on the flaming cloud  
Of Muspel's Sons, and struck at Surtur's breast.  
But oh, he lacked his sharp self-waving sword,  
Which he had given to Skirnir, his young  
page,

During the wooing of Frost-prisoned Gerd,  
Gerda the " Sleeping Beauty " of our youth,  
Whom Freyer, the Prince of Day, re-kissed to  
life.

Odin his eye had lost and Frey his brand,  
But Surtur's self-swayed sword, that like the  
sun

## THE LAST BATTLE

Flashed through that Battle, circled in an arc  
Of golden lightning, like Excalibur  
In Arthur's legend, and dealt Frey his death.  
Then Thor against the Midgard Snake advanced  
With lofty port, and lifting high his Club  
Miölnir, hight the Miller, smote and slew  
The writh'd enormous terror. Back Thor stept  
Nine paces, but forgot that serpents still  
Mechanically for long after death  
Perform their wormy functions, so that oft  
An adder severed by a hedger's scythe  
Unconsciously will curl this way and that,  
A dread to those who watch! This adder now,  
Dying, envenomed the surrounding air  
So direfully, that breathing in deep breaths  
As an athlete will, Odin's mighty son  
Fell poisoned to the ground! So ended Thor.  
Anon in final combat Heimdal locked  
With Loki, that Imprisoner, and lord  
Of those intruding armies. Long they strove,  
Dealing fierce blows, which had they fallen on  
earth  
Had shaken her unto her outposts far.

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

And, at the last, one stabbing, one with thrusts,  
In mutual death they thunderously fell.  
With that a little vengeance cheered the gods.  
Vidar, the August of Space, upon the Wolf,  
Now gluttoned by the feast that none might name,  
Rushed vengefully, and set his mighty shoe,  
Welded from shavings of the brogues men wear  
And shape in wintry hours beside their hearths,  
On the beast's nether jaw, and with one hand  
Its other quickly seized, and drove his sword  
Sheer down the yawning throat unto the hilt.  
So for a while great Odin was avenged.  
And Tyr, the valiant and the sage, attacked  
Garm, the huge hound of Hela. Grappling long  
They wrestled furiously, till Tyr prevailed,  
And the fierce monster cast upon his side  
To pant out life the heaped-up dead among.  
And now the leaders everywhere were fallen,  
And glorious Aesir and strange brutes difform  
Rolled in a death confused. The Serpent's tail  
Was wreathed around the pillar of Thor's neck,  
And Fenris in a fringe of heroes lay,  
And high on drifts of agonists were propped

## THE LAST BATTLE

Heimdal's and Loki's frames. But now no less,  
But fiercelier, more inexorably raged  
The combat. So, in that old civil war,  
In Brittany, a century ago,  
When nobles, leaders, priests were dead or fled,  
The desperate goatherds in their rage still fought  
For a spent cause and vanished polity,  
Altars now shattered and an exile King.  
It seemed in that last strife on Wigrid's Plain  
All earth and heaven were joined: high mountains fell,  
And deep abysmal crevices were cloven  
Down unto Hel itself: the skies were rent  
As is a garment in a struggling crowd:  
It seemed as though the firmament would fall,  
And moaning like a human thing in pain,  
With clamour of unnumbered swaying boughs,  
The Tree of Yggdrasil rocked to and fro,  
And dense upon the darkling bridge of Hel  
Innumerable thronged the new-born ghosts  
Of heroes slain, who sorrowfully trooped,  
With swinging hands, and loose unbucklered  
arms,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

An ever-hurrying ever-swelling horde,  
To dye with blood the Pillar of the World.

. . . . .  
And now the Dark One, the dread Surtur, rose,  
And upward slow began to draw himself.  
Taller and still more tall he waxed, until  
His head touched heaven. A ravening fire in  
front,

And walls of flame behind, he towered, as towers  
That *Torre* of Bologna Dante sang,  
And like that *Torre* in the travelling cloud,  
Betwixt the levins he obscurely loomed  
In darkness, whence his flaming sword emerged.  
Then that bright blade with gesture swift and  
vast

He flung o'er heaven and earth and all the  
worlds,

And straightway everything that breathes or is,  
—Hero and man, beast, bird, and creeping thing,  
And each slim tree, and every jagged rock,  
Spearing like some tall idol o'er the woods,  
And every herb and stone medicinal,—  
Was plunged into a rolling lake of fire.

## THE LAST BATTLE

Flame lapped the corners of the world and slew  
Those Elves that guard them, and great Ygg-  
drasil

Was girt about with flame, which but increased  
Before a howling tempest, till at length  
Heaven, earth, and the Nine Homes had ceased  
to be,

For Surtur's ravening wall had licked them up.  
And when the fire abated and a smoke  
Reddened across the blackened wreck of things,  
Over that anguish flowed the unquiet sea.

## The Re-birth

As to a watcher on a pier at night  
By western seas or deep Italian lakes,  
When neither moon nor stars in heaven appear,  
Slow-lifting water stretched far out of view  
Makes baffling strange appeal, until he asks,—  
“Shall day e’er dawn upon this dark again?”  
So now unto the shadow the great sea  
Called with enigma’s voice and to no light  
Rolled its unceasing waves, where naught that  
    lives  
Stirred, neither mermaid nor the fins of fish.  
Who knows what years, nay, years of years  
    now passed  
Across the ruined world? Not one there was  
To keep a count of days, though there were some  
Who slept as seeds within the heart of earth.

## THE RE-BIRTH

Yet shall a sleeper reckon Time's elapse,  
Or are dark hours counted in dreaming brains?  
At last one morn, if morn that can be called  
Which was but blackness, but a point of night  
In age-long shadow, once again arose  
The Star of Morning, o'er the sky-line gleamed,  
Bathed its bright head among the floods and  
shone

In the void heaven. Who did awake that star,  
Gave spontaneity to that bright orb,  
Advanced that resurrection? Never skald  
Has guessed at that tense riddle; I record  
Only the unreasoning tradition fine.  
And now a paleness crept along the cloud,  
And exquisitely, as in summers sped,  
The darkness faded to the rose of dawn.  
A moment, and the sun was in the sky.  
'Twas not that charioteer, whom long ago  
A ravening wolf perpetually pursued,  
But that star's daughter. Full of bloom and fire,  
Her tresses streaming in the viewless airs,  
She now sprang forward to her task sublime,  
But no fell monster chased her. As she shone,



## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Raining new warmth down on the dawn-flushed  
waves,

There grew a little island from their midst.

Slowly it grew : then broadened, and in sight  
Came mountains, which shook downward the  
ambient flood

From their great shoulders, as leviathan,  
Couched in his shallow on a summer's day,  
Gradually rises, lifting rugged crests,  
Dim coruscations upon flank and spine.

The continent of mountains waxed amain,

And soon beneath the radiance of the sun

They were re-belted with wide laughing woods

And steep slant meadows full of rippling grass,

And next about their feet long plains appeared

That glowed with vineyards, thick with purple  
grapes,

And waved across with cornfields harvest-ripe,

And greened in meadows overrun with flowers.

And as the marvel in the sea increased,

Sudden, with lovely clamour, all at once

The many-throated armies of the birds

Resumed their huge acclaim of ancient song !

## THE RE-BIRTH

The world had been re-born, and the Nine  
Homes,

And all the splendours of immortal heaven.

Where Asgard's gleaming palaces had risen

Before the burning, spread a vasty plain,

The Field of Ida called, and here at noon

The remnant of the Gods together met.

They had not suffered death, but how they  
balked

Surtur I know not, how escaped the fire

No skald has written. Balder now returned,

Balder the beautiful, the clement god,

Whom the branched mistletoe so blindly flung

Deathward to Hel. In that obscure demesne

Gladly almost he lingered. There at least

He saw not violent death nor constant scars,

But only patient faces of old men

Dead of their palsy, or of younger wights

Whom sickness or mayhap a falling tree,

At wood-cutting pulled wrily to the ground,

Deep in the shadow of the fir-woods old,

Had smitten out of season. With him came

Hodur, who guiltless slew him. Slow they paced

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

With intertwining arms as brothers wont,  
Forgiveness in their eyes. Anon to them  
Widar and Wali, those avenging gods,  
Appeared together : their supreme revenge  
No more they studied, but beholding friends,  
Cried in great ecstasy : " O Balder dear,  
O Hodur, blind old comrade, hail once more!  
We thought ye ne'er would reascend to light,  
And we no more should see ye ! What is this ?  
Have we been dreaming some long evil dream,  
Such as thou, Balder, dreamedst ere thy death ?  
Happy are we beholding you again !  
Let us sit here a little span and talk  
And settle our strayed minds ! " And as they  
spoke

Warmly, with happy teardrops in their eyes,  
Two tall heroic forms from forth a wood  
Emergent rose, and Thor's great sons returned,  
Magni and Modi, Power and Courage named.  
And in their arms they bore Miölnir back.  
Then sitting down upon their rocky thrones,  
They held high conclave there, and in these six  
Their fathers, the great Aesir, rose again.

## THE RE-BIRTH

Incarnate in these gods old powers re-spoke  
Pleasantly, as when dear friends parted long  
Meet over wine at eve. Of what had been,  
Of Jormungandir and of Fenris dead,  
And all the glories of the days that were,  
Long they colloqued, recalling their old runes,  
Those mysteries that sever gods from men.  
And one described a marvel he had seen,  
Saying, "When we were sitting in that dark  
Of late, or haply in that elder time  
Before the dread Last Battle,—for my thoughts  
Are in confusion wholly disarrayed,—  
With broken harps and useless swords piled up  
About us, and each one was drooping low  
A mourning meditative head, and thick  
Cobwebs of dreams about our eyes were woven,  
And ruddy dust of twilight filled the dusk,  
There was a stir in our vast cavernous hall,  
And lo! a panting messenger appeared,  
One who had travelled far, swum many streams,  
Crossed many Alps, descended many depths,  
With news from upper air. "O Gods," he cried,  
"Your day is over. Far, far hence are lands

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Which know you not, and have a different way  
Of living. I have seen them. There has risen  
One shall o'ershadow and outdo your fame!  
He is a pale worn man, of peasant stock,  
Yet mightier than all gods." Feebly we stirred  
At this strange treason, but while yet he spake,  
Wan in the twilight of our solitude,  
The shadows o'er his head were rent in twain,  
And we beheld the semblance of a Man,  
Nailed on a tree, and with effulgent eyes  
Bent pitying upon us! Therewith fell  
A deeper gloaming and I slept in night."

## The Re-building

THEN searching in the long grass at their feet  
The gods re-found the golden amulets  
Of the ancient Aesir, emblems of old might,  
And set them on their brows, and took in hand  
Miölnir to work magic in the world  
And be a consecration from the past.  
And Balder rose and built two other heavens.  
Audlang, the one, shone bright o'er Ida's Plain,  
And farther off, remoter in the blue  
Of the sweet skies, another, Widblain called.  
And over Gimli's Cavern there arose  
A hall more wonderful than Balder's house  
Bleidablik, the Wide Aspect, that was burnt.  
Gold decked the new hall brightlier than suns :  
It shone magnificent in heaven on high.  
And thither paced the six, and sat on thrones  
And looked on the green world. Loki long since  
Had cheated Heaven when Asgard's wall he built,  
But now no base chicane the stone-work flawed,

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

No giant threatened Heaven. Soon were prepared

Mansions for spirits just. On high was set  
The House of Brimir and on Nida-fiöll,  
Among the mountains, of red gold was raised  
The glittering House of Sindri. There should dwell

Spirits of gentle conduct, there survive  
The juries of the just, to lift aloft  
Perpetually the wine-cup and the mead.  
But down upon the Shore of the Dead Men  
Another hall arose of shape immense  
And aspect terrible. Toward the north,  
Inhospitable and tempestuous,  
Its open doors look out. 'Tis strangely wrought  
Of serpents' backs, like wattles interwoven,  
And all the snakes' great hissing heads are turned  
Toward its dark recesses, and breathe forth  
Venom, whereof long sinuous rivers creep  
Up hall and down. And, as great Wala saith,  
The perjured and the banished murderer  
Within its thick meandering shall crawl.  
Then Balder, sitting with the gods enthroned

## THE RE-BUILDING

In the new hall o'er Gimli's Cavern high,  
Turned to his fellows and prophetic spake,  
The sunlight falling on his clement brow :—  
“ In yon bright world no living creature walks  
That has the gift of immortality.  
Come, brethren, let us found the Race of Men,  
And from two parents the great earth re-fill  
With laughter and the happy toils of hands,  
And love and fortitude ! I wot of two  
Who shall engender all the tribes of men,—  
The fierce and skilful peoples of the South,  
They who build temples and make laws for man ;  
The subtle dark-haired people of the West,  
Nations of bards, and they who conquer them,  
Laborious, northern, fair-tressed, blue-eyed folk,  
Who in their several branches shall possess  
Yon earth in wisdom and in temperate rule.  
I mark their ships new-launched on many seas !  
I mark their bloodless conquests ! I respire  
The breath of their large dawn ! ” Ah, Balder  
fair,  
Regin the unfathomable blinded thee  
With viewless hand across thy prophet eyes !



ASGARD

THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

Thou saw'st not modern Prussias, Vain  
Not yet evolved from berserk darkness old  
The crapula of progress in far lands!

In the deep quiet valley, where of yore  
Urd's Fountain flowed, and Odin counsel took  
With Mimir's Head, there was a tumulus,  
An old grey barrow covered o'er with heath,  
Hoddmimir called, which clove as Balder waved  
Miölnir over it and brought to light  
A sleeping youth and maiden. The Sun's kiss  
Upon their breathing lips awakened them.  
They rose : they sure had slept not many hours.  
It seemed so short a span since, tired with play  
And wandering in the sunny fields of Youth,  
They had sunk down to sleep. They had not felt  
The darkness, and the winter, and the fire,  
But, fed with dew, had dreamed away the void.  
Now, hand in hand, they wandered through the  
world,  
Which was the same as the old, yet lovelier.  
And as a traveller with his life-work done  
And death not distant may at last attain

## THE RE-BUILDING

To the fulfilment of an ancient dream,  
And find himself one eve descending swift  
The long bright segments of the road that leads  
Down into Piedmont's plains of ruddy light ;  
Up from his pillow his tired head he lifts  
And gazes on the marvel of the South,  
So opulently sunlit, so august ;  
Marks the red plain's illimitable grace,  
The farms with Roman archways, the far peaks  
Scarped exquisitely on the purple skies,  
The vineyards, the grey oliveyards astir  
In the suave airs, the poplars, the curved streams  
Like silvern sickles rounding far and far ;  
And sighs and in a whisper says, " At last !  
After the toil of years, the hope deferred,  
The cheating of my heart with dreams in books,  
The darkness, I attain ! 'Tis Italy !  
The Fimbul Winter held me yesterday :  
In Paris an east wind careering blew,  
And London choked me sourly ere I left  
With that thick fog which is the Poet's shroud.  
I shiver and remember. How have I  
Lived all these years amid those squalid mists ? "

## THE TRAGEDY OF ASGARD

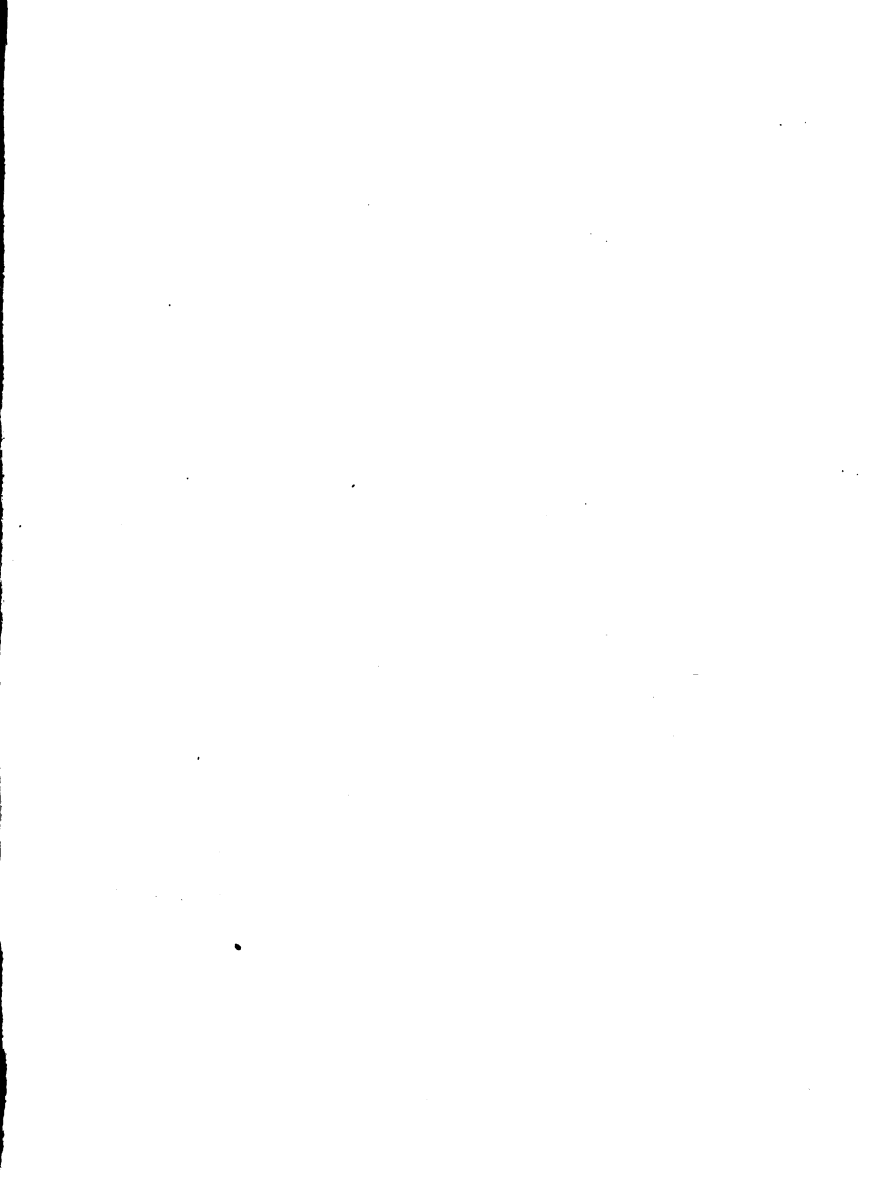
The sunny freshness fans his hollow cheek ;  
He looks abroad, experiencing such rest,  
Such peace, such consolation, 'tis as though  
He entered into Heaven while yet he lived !  
So now the pair, Life and Desire-of-Life,  
The youth and maiden, went slow-wandering  
down

Into the golden plains and that new world,  
And saw the meadows stocked with grazing kine,  
The lamb at play, the hare upon the heath,  
The wolfless forests void of Fenrir's brood,  
The thick grass full of many-coloured snakes  
That glided fangless by. They drank the scents  
Of myriad flowers and felt their pensive brows  
Fanned by the breath of Immortality,  
Which they had nowise dreamt of overnight.

. . . . .  
Now, as the god concluding his grand theme  
To Snorri Sturlesson exclaimed,—Enough !  
Since ev'n if thou shouldst question me at large,  
I know not, Man, what thou shouldst hear beside.  
For never have I known one further pressed  
Upon the story of Earth's destinies !









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